Gatekeeper - A Horror Story Inspired by George Wofford's `Rules of Passage´ creepypasta, which is at:
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The story begins:

In the Suburbs of Sewage City, the Hollywood USA that we all imagine due to movies;

Shortly after sunset, a pale-skinned man in a small apartment rises from a bed. His movements are slow, inaccurate, and clumsy. He walks into the bathroom, checks a filter attached to the water, and washes his hands and face. The towel barely placed back where it belongs, he leaves the bath and fetches a bottle from the ground, pouring some of the liquid into a water boiler. Next, he juggles a package of paper filters, puts some into each other, and fills a brown powder from a glass jar into those filters. Cautiously placing them on a mug, he stares at the water boiler, and seemingly discontent with the result, he does a handful of barely proper moves known from Yoga and old Kung Fu, the type one mimics before a TV screen or video.

Steam arises from the water boiler, and a clicking sound makes the man stop activating his obviously still groggy body. He grabs the boiler, pours some of the liquid into the prepared mug, then opens a fridge and pours milk into the mug. Cautiously sniffing the steam arising from that mug, he smirks. Seemingly content with the result, he walks back into the main room of the cramped apartment, takes a sip from the mug, and lights a cigarette.

Passing seconds become minutes, as the man smokes half the length of a cigarette before extinguishing it in what seems a self-made ashtray.

After one more sip from the coffee mug, he stands up, kicking the ashtray accidentally, and rushes to fetch cleaning tools. Soon after the chores, he stores the tools and gets dressed. Putting what seems to be a wool cardigan over a sweatshirt, groggily getting into pants, and finally into some lightweight slippers.

He opens a small window, then fetches a little incense burner from a desk, and starts burning a stick of incense from a package labeled `Light Sandalwood´. Positioning a grounded, metallic fan in the classic design, he starts the ventilation in a slow mode. Once more sipping from his coffee and smoking another cigarette to half length, before fetching a phone from his jacket, and keeping it in his left hand, as if expecting a message or call.

A bit more time passes before the man looks at the phone's touchscreen, which had just come alight from the dark state it was in. He walks to the apartment door and opens it.

From the corridor, three more people enter the apartment of the man. The first person is a Latino male, and the way they greet each other tells that the two have known each other for a while. The second visitor seems female, and possibly the offspring of one of the many mixed American-Asian marriages that made the USA one of the most tolerant cultures on planet Earth. This person prefers a formal greeting and clearly keeps her distance from her host. Last, but not least, a large, dark-skinned man moving rigidly, the way only former soldiers learned to do. His greeting is a mere nod, and positioning himself between the woman and the others, he seems to either be the protective, aka jealous type, or a bodyguard by profession.

As the host, the first to start talking more is the groggy apartment dweller.

Aron Plebs: `Welcome, my name is Aron Plebs, and you paid me for showing you the aforementioned anomaly and trying my best to keep it stable long enough for you to take a few steps inside, if you choose to do so. Let me also help us save some time. I discovered this by chance, not by talent or qualification in any form. Further, I am neither into monetizing video streams of the paranormal, nor crazier than the typical folks we all could meet in the New York subways, Chicago Suburbs, or Boston area.´

Glances are exchanged, and Aron directs the three visitors toward what seems to be a wardrobe door.

Aron Plebs: `Precautions first, as I consider these mandatory, and what you soon will see with your own eyes, smell with your noses, and eavesdrop on with your ears must be considered uncharted territory, be it only by our individual lack of better knowledge and experience. The glowsticks are a must, and the vests I have prepared for you are a survival measure, not some cheap-shot sales trick!´

Aron grabs three packages of worker gear, each having a silvery blue colored vest, and each vest, as Aron proudly shows to each visitor, has one of the white-light glowsticks attached in each holder slot on the chest and on the back.

Aron Plebs: `I am not a hallucinating fellow, and neither overtly homicidal. Those shadows that I talked about before are real and effing dangerous!

So far, all I discovered was that the bright, white, aka cold light keeps them away more efficiently than the yellow light that our eyes prefer, and much better than the green or purple lights we know from night vision gear or crime scene investigators.´

The three visitors listen, or pretend to listen, while Aron goes through his routine.

Aron Plebs: `The shadows come in at least two forms I have encountered before. The first sort is lurkers, who can arise from any, literally any, dark spot around you. Which is why you have those glowsticks attached to the vests, making real darkness in your vicinity nearly impossible until you mess up.´

Melinda Wong: `We are supposed to walk into a wardrobe wearing these construction worker vests with silly glowsticks?´

Aron Plebs: `Yes, if one keeps it simplified, exactly that is what you paid me for. Factually, the wardrobe door will, in less than ten minutes, take a pause from being my former wardrobe, and instead be a portal into an area that I could say seems like something better suiting that Twilight Zone TV series or similar.´

Melinda Scoffs and the other two visitors merely look at each other.

Aron Plebs: `Nobody is forced to venture in there, if you want to be content with merely watching it happen and taking a look, that is fully OK with me!

Otherwise, activating the glowsticks by knicking them in the middle, placing them in the vest holders, and keeping those vests on your body are the mandatory precautions it takes.´

Ebon Chappelle: `Before you were interrupted, you said there are two known forms of troublemakers to expect. The surprise assailants we are supposed to keep at bay due to the glowsticks, and the other would be?´

Aron Plebs: `Brutes. Assailants are trying to rush you in the way that people losing it, or rabid dogs, would attack. That does not make it possible for them to exist in the lights, but what seems to be their screams do not impact our ears; they instead may cause severe headaches, nausea, or dizziness. Still, when even half your glowsticks are on, they cannot reach you at all, and you will go in with several spare glowsticks, so you can lighten up your perimeter, or your retreat, on demand.´

Paco Gomez: `Man, it really IS the real thing, eh? After all those years, the sciences are NOT always true.´

Aron Plebs: `Stay cautious, such is all it takes. And, keep your first time short. It is wiser and safer. If you must check the Diner, if any of you have a severe need to speak to dead relatives, then place active glowsticks right and left of your pathway, and make sure to not be in there for more than two hours. It could be as simple as me falling asleep from too much waiting. Zero unnecessary risks, we can attempt again later.´

Aron fetches a box and unpacks from it two bags of glowsticks, the five-inch long ones in white, and three outdoor lanterns.

Aron Plebs: `I will keep only some glowsticks for me, all of you get a lantern and at least eight more glowsticks, so you have some to guide your way.´

The visitors nod, yet in the same way that disbelief makes most of us play along with stuff we consider a hoax or folly.

Aron Plebs: `It is just a guess, but would I be wrong on at least one of you packing some heat?´

Ebon Chappelle: `I am licensed to concealed carry.´

Aron Plebs: `Would either 9mm or .357 Magnum be part of it?´

Ebon Chappelle: `Magnum it is.´

Aron walks to his jacket, the one still close to his bed, and takes something out of an inside pocket. Then, he returns to his visitors and offers Ebon a slim, metallic object.

Ebon Chappelle: `Dragonbreath? Phosphorous bullets, highly illegal in most states.´

Aron Plebs: `Untested survival measure in this state. One magazine is all I could get, and it is only ten bullets if they did not rip me off.´

Ebon investigates the pistol magazine, then takes each bullet out of it with fluent moves, checking each bullet thoroughly.

Aron looks at the incense burning, the length of it burned down by now, vaguely telling him how much time has passed.

Aron Plebs: `Excuse me a moment, I get nervous.´

Aron walks back to his bed, lights another cigarette, and inhales deeply. After a second inhale, he extinguishes this one, avoids kicking the ashtray again, and returns to his visitors. His guests, though, are distracted by more important things than a need to scold him for smoking. The wardrobe door vibrates, and from inside it, a pulsing light can be seen.

Aron Plebs: `Let me handle it!´

Aron walks to the wardrobe door and opens it. By the size of the apartment, the wardrobe should be less than one yard in depth; still, Aron vanishes entirely from sight when he steps in.

Aron Plebs: `Knick-knack one, knick-knack two. Done. Kick-knack three, and knick-knack four. Done. All set up, you can take a look now.´

The visitors, still awestruck by the phenomenon really happening, stumble forward, all still keeping their distance from the portal and merely peeking through it.

Melinda Wong: `Well, for what it's worth, you earned your pay.´

Melinda raises her phone and shows the `Bitcoin Bombardement APP´ running with Aron's name as the recipient of 250 bitcoins.

Finally, bravery and curiosity have their marriage of the moment, and the three visitors dare make hesitant steps through the portal. Each wearing their vest, glowsticks activated on the front and back, they take some steps, shrugging off their former disbelief and latent fears.

After around two minutes, it is Melinda returning to the portal, where Aron still waits in his lighted position.

Melinda Wong: `We decided to check the Diner and say hello there. Timer is set to thirty minutes, so we should be back here in around forty minutes.´

Aron nods, checks his phone to see the time, and continues his guardian at the threshold routine.

More time passes, and around forty minutes later, the three visitors rush back through the portal. Each is seemingly happy to leave the danger zone behind.

Aron Plebs: `Let me close it for good!´ says Aron and moves his hands into the pulsating light. Soon thereafter, the portal becomes unstable and vanishes completely.

The visitors get out of their vests, with only Melinda deciding to keep hers as a trophy. Shortly before 9pm, the trio leaves the apartment and makes their way to the parking lot.

Melinda Wong: `From low-income loser to guardian at the threshold, just as you had said before, Paco. Weird but true.´

Paco Gomez: `Indeed, but really experiencing it THAT was the real deal. Who were those people you talked to at the Diner?´

Melinda Wong: `Deceased relatives, an uncle and his second wife, if I remember the family tree properly.´

Paco Gomez: `Are you satisfied with what your money got you?´

Melinda Wong: `More than that, and also a bonus for my bodyguard!´

Ebon Chappelle: `Thank you, it was a close call when those shadows tried to close in on us on the way back.´

Melinda Wong: `You did great, and we still had a handful of glowsticks remaining. Safe enough for a first scouting walk.´

The three left the elevator and made it to the parking lot. A parking lot devoid of the notorious parking lot punks who recently made their name among criminal threats to watch out for.

Paco Gomez: `I'll drop both of you off at the motel, right?´

Melinda Wong: `Appreciated. Saves us waiting for a taxi ride or Uber. Thank you.´

Embarking, the three were finally ready for a good night's sleep.

One flicker of light, as if a minimal power outage, and surprise took its toll. Darkness got a hold on them, and life drained out of three human bodies in ways only known from video games or movies. Skin dried up, and human flesh went stiff and lifeless. Death reigned, whereas seconds before, life still was good.

The next morning, police would be in on another unexplained death case reported, but tonight, no witnesses were left around, so whatever slithered through the darkness, a darkness it could nearly be part of, might have gotten away. For now.

The end!

post scriptum

A future, improved edition is possible. Yet, I make no promises, since my medical troubles, age, and acceptance of my failures to get into sales have by now become routine to handle!

Poverty sux, and I am too old to go unpaid happily!

PDF freebies: https://www.calameo.com/accounts/7603697

My Youtube channel with Wendy McCandy specials:
https://www.youtube.com/@FridgeReaver/videos

Even with AI support and proofreading, such a story takes more than 2 hours of unpaid work, and that is the writing & editing only: The audio (AI voice) adaptation takes 4 more hours, and narrators also prefer getting paid, instead of reading or hearing how preferred to AI voices they supposedly are, yet not earning a fucking cent!

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This story narrated by Adam `Capricious´ Cabrera is at:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XcydRIyaTgw

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